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SUBJECT: USDOL-FUNDED CHILD LABOR PROJECT BACK ON TRACK

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A \$6 million U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)-funded "Education Initiative" project aimed at removing children from agricultural work in six Turkish provinces is back on track. Negotiations between officials from Turkey's Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MOLSS), Ministry of National Education (MONE), USDOL's International Relations Analyst Mihail Seroaka, and Embassy Labor Attache successfully reached an agreement in principle to refocus part of the project budget on direct incentives to help ensure working children enroll in school and at-risk children already in school stay there. The negotiations also led to a breakthrough on the text of a protocol agreement between USDOL's project grantee, IMPAQ International, and the GOT that will govern their relationship and cooperation on the project. As soon as IMPAQ and MOLSS sign the protocol agreement and USDOL gives final approval to the revised project budget, we hope the final two years of this four-year project will achieve the project's primary goal -- to remove children from work in the fields and ensure that they are placed on a path to greater potential success through education. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) IMPAQ International established an office in Turkey in 2004 to carry out a grant agreement it had signed with USDOL.

Under the terms of the four-year agreement, IMPAQ's objective by 2008 was to reduce the incidence of child labor in six provinces in Turkey through:

- the development and implementation of pilot educational interventions directed at migrant children using existing GOT educational and social services;
- the development of additional institutions responsive to the needs of migrant and marginalized children laboring in the agricultural sector;
- the implementation of an information campaign on health and safety practices targeted to address child labor and gender issues related to agriculture; and
- the creation of a highly-structured monitoring and evaluation process to measure program effectiveness and provide a basis for policy dialogue and discussions among relevant government agencies and other stakeholders.

¶3. (SBU) Unfortunately, IMPAQ ran into difficulties with the GOT bureaucracy early on, largely because of expectations of the child labor unit in Turkey's MOLSS that it and MONE, through a Project Coordination Center (PCC) consisting of dedicated employees from both ministries, would be able to be involved in making decisions at the micro level for the project. Never having worked previously on a child labor project with IMPAQ nor cooperated with USDOL on child labor projects outside those funded through the International Labor Organization's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC), Turkey's child labor experts at MOLSS and MONE became frustrated with their inability directly to control aspects of the IMPAQ project's budgeting and direction.

14. (SBU) As a result, IMPAQ and the GOT had never reached agreement on a protocol agreement that would govern the relationship between the government entities and IMPAQ, as well as lay out the responsibilities of IMPAQ and the government's Project Coordination Center. Lacking such an agreement, GOT officials became increasingly frustrated with their inability to communicate their desires for the project to IMPAQ as well as with what they perceived as inaction on IMPAQ's part, and began to withdraw field support for the project in the provinces. MOLSS officials also complained about IMPAQ's Ankara-based project director not having the authority to make decisions without first referring either to IMPAQ Washington, USDOL, or both.

15. (SBU) After two years and little to show for the time and money expended on the project, an exchange of letters between USDOL's Deputy Under Secretary for International Labor Affairs James Carter and Directors General at both MOLSS and MONE led to the October 28-November 9 visit of USDL's International Relations Analyst Mihail Seroka to Turkey. Mr. Seroka's meetings with MOLSS and MONE officials established the foundation for a government-to-government relationship at the working level and provided GOT officials a level of confidence in the USG commitment to cooperating with the GOT on this project.

16. (SBU) Working against a November 2 deadline, at which time Turkey's National Steering Committee on child labor issues was expected to call for the end of the IMPAQ-led project in Turkey, Mr. Seroka and Laboff endeavored to convince GOT officials to continue working with IMPAQ on the project. In response to the GOT's expressed desire to expend most of the remaining funding on direct incentives to children to ensure their initial registration or continued enrollment in school, we injected a dose of reality into the budget discussions and identified a funding level for incentives that was feasible in light of the amount of remaining funds. Given goodwill established and progress made during the negotiations, MOLSS convinced the National Steering Committee to postpone making a decision concerning the IMPAQ project at its November 2 meeting. Subsequently, working directly with MOLSS and IMPAQ officials, we facilitated agreement on the text of the project protocol agreement. Following final negotiations on November 8, MOLSS officials expressed satisfaction with both the protocol text and the budget outline agreed upon. They also agreed to engage with IMPAQ representatives in the near future to develop a cooperative workplan to ensure that henceforth the project maintains this newly attained momentum.

17. (SBU) Pending signature of the protocol text by MOLSS and IMPAQ officials and approval of the revised project budget by USDOL, the path has been cleared of obstacles. We hope the 10,000 children the project aims to help by 2008, as well as bilateral cooperation, will now benefit as originally foreseen.

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